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The Gem State Guardian

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A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter performs a mock insertion during air assault training conducted by members of A Company, 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Task Force, at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, Calif., Aug. 19. The task force, made up of National Guard units from six states, provide air support to the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team during force-on-force battle simulation training. (Photo by Maj. W. Chris Clyne, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Task Force Talon supports 116th

By Lt. Col. Darren T. Blagburn

FORT IRWIN, Calif. - Two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters kick up dust on a hilltop in the Mojave Desert as Soldiers pile out, hit the ground and establish security during a practice air insertion, Aug. 20. Air insertions are just one of the tasks the 1-183rd Aviation "Task Force Talon" is executing in support of the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team's rotation at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, Aug. 14-25, 2015.

"During NTC rotation 15-09, Task Force Talon is providing the CBCT full aviation operational support in terms of attack aviation, lift and medical evacuation operations," said Maj. Chris Schoonover, of Boise, Idaho, commander of the 1-183rd Aviation Task Force.

Composed of Army National Guard

units from six states, the 1-183rd Aviation Task Force consists of an attack aviation company and multiple companies of general support aviation assets. Each airframe has a unique mission, and the units' Soldiers train to increase their proficiency as pilots, support personnel and maintainers. Together, Task Force Talon ensures the CBCT has the advantage when it comes to fighting, moving Soldiers and equipment and medical evacuation support.

"The ability to bring together units from six different states and come together as a task force, move out to the field and execute operations, really demonstrates the level and abilities of National Guard Soldiers to work as a team," Schoonover said.

The 1st Battalion, 183rd Attack Reconnaissance is providing 12 Apaches and a company of pilots to support the rotation. The battalion leadership is also overseeing command and control of the task

force. The 1-183rd pilots completed their transition from AH-64A to AH-64D models last year.

The CBCT's lift support consists of Idaho's A Company, 1st Battalion, 168th General Support Aviation and pilots from B Company, 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation of Maryland and Virginia. Two CH-47 Chinook helicopters from B Company, 2nd Battalion, 149th Aviation from Arlington, Texas, round out the heavy-lift capabilities.

The CBCT is receiving combat aeromedical evacuation support from C Company, 5th Battalion, 159th General Support Aviation (C Company, 5-159th GSAB), from Montana and Wyoming.

"The other states' units operate in a different environment and they haven't conducted dust or mountain-top landings," said Sgt. Jason Tugby, of Boise, Idaho, a UH-60 Black Hawk crew



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chief with A Company 1-168th GSAB. "We have been training together, so the Maryland and Virginia pilots have experienced a new style of flying and it will increase their abilities."

The task of managing airspace falls to a section of air traffic controllers from F Company, 2nd Battalion, 211th General Support Aviation from Arkansas. The air traffic controllers track the locations and communicate with aircraft to deconflict airspace.

A key to success at NTC is keeping the helicopters flying, and it takes more than having qualified pilots. Soldiers from B Company, 449th Aviation Support Battalion organic maintenance support personnel. Soldiers of E Company, Forward Support Company, 1-183rd ARB feed, fuel and complete vehicle maintenance to keep the Soldiers and equipment in working condition.

Pilots flying one of the most advanced attack helicopters in the world practiced their target acquisition skills during live-fire gunnery in support of the ground combat units. After gunnery, they transitioned to supporting the ground units during a three-day, force-on-force mission against the opposing force.

"This training allows us to see the big picture and how we would be utilized," said Chief Warrant Officer Mike Barbero, from Boise, Idaho, with C Company, 1-183rd ARB. "It is a little different than when we go out and



A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief from the 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Task Force, scans the terrain with his M240 machine gun while his aircraft flies alongside another Black Hawk during a mission to transport Soldiers and equipment throughout the battlefield at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif., Aug. 22. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Arthur Ruepong/Released)

plan our aviation-based missions; now we are fighting with the ground commander."

The Idaho, Maryland and Virginia Black Hawk pilots have conducted dozens of missions moving dignitaries, unit leadership and equipment throughout the training area.

"We have been conducting missions moving the Battalion and brigade commanders who want to see their troops to check on their condition as well as critical repair parts," said Warrant Officer Derrek Bohman, of Boise, Idaho, a Black Hawk pilot with A

Company, 1-168th GSAB.

An important mission for the utility helicopters is the air insertion of Soldiers. Crew chiefs conduct training sessions with Soldiers to teach them the proper methods of entering and exiting the aircraft during air assaults. Each Black Hawk carries up to 11 Soldiers and their gear, while a Chinook can carry 36 Soldiers, but it isn't a bus ride for the Soldiers. The pilots typically fly fast and low to the ground to avoid enemy contact. Like a shell game, the pilots execute false insertions to protect the location of the real insertion.

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Sgt. Nicholas Deem of A Company, 1st Battalion, 183rd Aviation Task Force, scans the interior of his UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, while conducting a familiarization flight for Idaho Army National Guard Soldiers of the 116th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team's combat observation lasing team (COLT) at the National Training Center (NTC), Fort Irwin, Calif., Aug. 19. (Photo by Maj. W. Chris Clvne. 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

"We completed an air assault mission behind enemy lines, so the forward observers could coordinate for Apache air support during the battle," Bohman said. "The mission took a lot of time to plan and coordinate between the aviation and ground units, but it was a success. We got them in undetected, and they completed their mission successfully."

When a Soldier becomes seriously injured, one of the commander's most valuable assets on the battlefield is the HH-60 Black Hawk medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) helicopter. The Army designed it specifically for transporting Soldiers off-site to a medical care facility. The MEDEVAC can be on-station in less than 30 minutes. The

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Sand, dirt, heat and other elements found in a desert environment create problems with the sensitive equipment, so without the maintenance and support personnel, the helicopters would remain grounded. Austere desert conditions, like those at NTC, cause mechanics to work tirelessly in 115 degree heat to maintain the equipment. If a warning light comes on in a helicopter, it can mean the difference between life and death. An Apache's electronics are incredibly complicated, so if a part breaks, the Soldiers will swap out the entire component. Swapping components ensures a faster turnaround, as long as the part is in stock.

crew of medics can treat and monitor patients using special equipment installed inside the Black Hawk, such as oxygen and suction devices, heart and oxygen monitors.

"Each Soldier in the task force is a contributor to the success of this organization," Schoonover said. "This training shows how vigilant, prepared and ready to support our nation's defense the Guard is."

"The maintenance of the helicopters is going very well," said 1st Lt. Jordan Dosch, of Boise, Idaho, a maintenance platoon leader with D Company, 1-183 ARB. "All of the Apaches are fully mission capable except one that received notional 'battle damage.' Morale is highest when the Soldiers get to do work on the Apaches to bring them back into operational status."

The logistics operations are at the heart of the task force. Getting parts to the helicopter mechanics is the responsibility of E Company, 1-183 ARB, as is pumping bulk fuel into the fleet. Mechanics maintain the task force's vehicles and the cooks feed the force.

The 1-183rd Aviation Task Force is a battlefield multiplier when focused, armed and ready to support the 116th CBCT's fight. Without the team of pilots, mechanics and support personnel, the more than 20 helicopters would not make it off the ground. Each airframe has a particular mission, but each Soldier is essential to winning the fight.

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